



Press Release

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Contact:
Kelly Browning, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Impact Teen Drivers
(916) 733-7432 office
(813) 728-3998 mobile
kbrowning@impactteendrivers.org
www.ImpactTeenDrivers.org

Partners Team to Stop the Number One Killer of Teens

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Education, legislative, and law enforcement leaders joined to announce California's Teen Driving Safety Week, March 6–12, 2011. Reckless and distracted driving is the number one killer of teens in the U.S., with car crashes resulting in about 3,500 teen deaths in 2009. More than two-thirds of fatal teen crashes have nothing to do with drugs or alcohol, but are a result of distractions, speed, and other poor driving decisions. The crash risk per mile driven by 16-year-olds is twice that of 18- to 19-year-olds and about four times the risk for drivers ages 30-59, according to a study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Distractions.gov defines distracted driving as “any non-driving activity a person engages in that has the potential to distract him or her from the primary task of driving and increase the risk of crashing.” They describe three main types of distraction: visual, when the driver takes his eyes off the road; manual, when the driver takes his hands off the wheel, and cognitive, when the driver takes his mind off driving. Although all distractions are dangerous, texting while driving encompasses all three types of distraction, making it particularly lethal. According to a study by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, texting while driving increases the risk of a crash 23-fold. The study further indicated that the average text message takes 5 seconds, which means that a driver who texts at 55 mph would travel the length of a football field without ever looking at the road. A 2009 self-report survey found that 51.4% of drivers age 16–19 admit to texting while driving, despite laws in many states prohibiting it. This is despite 95% of drivers who admitted to texting while driving recognizing that doing so makes them more likely to be involved in a collision, and 55% said that it made them much more likely to be involved in a crash. Yet drivers use a number of justifications, including trusting their own driving more than that of others or believing that only occasionally doing something dangerous makes it OK, when it comes to the decisions they make behind the wheel.

“Too many teenagers continue to drive distracted even though they’re aware that their actions put them and others at risk of being involved in a crash; this dangerous and potentially deadly behavior needs to stop,” said California Highway Patrol (CHP) Commissioner Joe Farrow. “Bottom line, distractions behind the wheel can destroy lives.”

Impact Teen Drivers, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating teens, parents, and community members about the dangers of distracted driving and changing dangerous behavior behind the wheel, asks the question, “What do you consider lethal?” The organization reaches out to schools with interactive

programs and free resources including videos, a website geared toward adults (www.impactteendrivers.org) and another geared toward teens (www.whatdoyouconsiderlethal.com), and social marketing sites that spread the message that everyday behaviors, including texting, talking on the phone, adjusting the stereo, eating and drinking, and chatting with friends, can become lethal when done behind the wheel. Impact Teen Drivers engages teens in dialog about distracted driving, delivers safe driving messages to Californians, and aims to change the culture of driving, so that just as it is socially unacceptable to drive drunk or without your seatbelt, it will no longer be socially acceptable to drive while distracted.

“It is crucial that we educate teens and empower them to promote the safe driving message in order to have a fundamental and sustained behavior shift,” said Kelly Browning, executive director of Impact Teen Drivers. “Although teens are our focal group, we also work with parents, teachers, law enforcement, and community members to promote a multi-faceted approach that fosters a culture of safe, distraction-free driving. It is primarily through this cultural change that distracted driving and the dangers it poses can be significantly curtailed.”

Impact Teen Drivers is a nonprofit organization sponsored by the California Association of Highway Patrolmen, California Teachers Association, and California Casualty Insurance. The list of supporters includes the CHP, Office of Traffic Safety, DMV, RADD, California State Firefighters Association, the Peace Officers Research Association of California, and the Association of California School Administrators. The program has a vast number of volunteers, including students who served as advisors in developing the program materials, teachers, and parents of teens killed in crashes. For more information about Impact Teen Drivers or to find out how you can become involved, please e-mail info@impactteendrivers.org or call 916-733-7432.

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